

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
Mayor Racquel Vasquez

Lemon Grove Library, Community Room
August 10, 2022

Good evening honored guests and residents of Lemon Grove – the city with the “Best Climate on Earth.”

Before I begin my formal address, let us recognize Troop 6786 for presenting arms and leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance. These outstanding young women are our future leaders, teachers, doctors, inventors, and mothers!

From my heart, I offer a warm thank-you to Pastor Anne Stapleton for the beautiful and inspirational thoughts. Words of wisdom and prudence, we should all strive to live by.

I am pleased to be here this evening to present the 2022 State of the City Address – IN PERSON!

There are so many good things happening in Lemon Grove that demonstrate our community's resilience and emphasize that we are coming back STRONGER THAN EVER!

Tonight, I will share some of the “Good” things we have been doing in Lemon Grove and announce our plans for more in the coming year.

This past year has had its challenges: from the resurgence of the COVID virus to housing litigation, homelessness, and city staffing concerns.

My Council colleagues and I remain steadfast in keeping our focus on moving city business forward; we will not slow down, and we will stay FOCUSED on effective and efficient government. Allow me to share some highlights.

In the past year, we allocated \$1.2 million dollars to street maintenance and repair. This is the largest allocation in the history of our city. These funds will enable us to resurface 49 street segments and repair several streets in disrepair. The streets scheduled to be repaired are Taft, Bakersfield and Calvacado.

Two years ago, we made significant progress in repairing and maintaining our streets with a historic investment of \$900 thousand dollars. Last year, the investment was increased to \$1.2 million dollars. And I am pleased to announce that we will be able to increase that investment again this year. This is significant progress toward addressing an \$18 million dollar street repair backlog.

Let me put this into perspective: Over \$2 million dollars was committed to street repair and maintenance in the last two years. Compare that to five years ago when the city spent \$350 thousand dollars on our streets annually.

In this year's budget, \$1.3 million dollars is allocated for street repair and maintenance. The \$1.3 million dollar allocation this year demonstrates that my Council colleagues and I remain committed to improving all of the streets in our community.

Speaking of better streets, we have also made progress in our "Complete Street" plan for safer and more attractive streets in Lemon Grove. Our plan is focused on creating street connections that will better serve bicyclists, pedestrians and drivers. You can see some of the important progress of that plan in the nearly completed improvements along Golden Avenue.

This grant-funded project adds wide sidewalks, street lights and a lush crown of shade trees. Once completed, this project will enhance the safety and curbside appeal along Golden Avenue. The Complete Street project was made possible with the generous donation of land by forward-thinking, community-minded businesses bordering the project.

Lemon Grove was awarded a state grant to help bring the Complete Street concept forward— to create a plan that will begin to transform our varied streetscapes into safe and beautiful complete streets. Thoughtful and well-planned transformations take time, hard work and patience. Working with the State of California and Lemon Grove business leaders, we have made a strong beginning in building WALKABLE CONNECTIONS in our city.

This year, a key partnership was established with the Urban League of San Diego County to bring some additional positive programs to Lemon Grove residents. These programs include assistance for first-time home buyers and a college readiness program that teaches young people the possibilities and benefits of

higher education. I would like to recognize the Urban League of San Diego County, for partnering with the City of Lemon Grove to improve lives and opportunities in our community so meaningfully.

The growing number of homeless people continues to concern our community. This complex issue presents us with no easy solutions. Each unhoused individual requires a variety of services. Therefore, as we strive to positively and respectfully meet those needs, we are expanding our experienced outreach team, which is led by Home-Start.

Home Start and city staff have sponsored a “Cards for Trash” pilot program that encourages our homeless neighbors to clean up their campsites in exchange for bags of essentials and gift cards. Our program aims to connect unhoused people, who may not have access to traditional outreach programs with community services, and to instill in them, a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

A practical solution to this complex and sensitive issue requires a regional strategy. This spring, the Lemon Grove City Council formalized a partnership with the other cities in East County: La Mesa, El Cajon and Santee - as well as with the County of San Diego, to create the first in the county “Memorandum of Understanding.” This Memorandum of Understanding will coordinate a regional approach in our efforts to reduce homelessness. Our regional cooperation will strengthen efforts to assist the unsheltered in finding appropriate housing and bring in State and Federal resources and funding to expand our homeless outreach programs.

I would like to recognize my fellow East County Mayors, Mark Arapostathis, Bill Wells and John Minto, and Supervisors, Nathan Fletcher and Joel Anderson, by acknowledging the importance of this coordinated effort to strengthen the East Region’s effort to help those who are unsheltered.

Friends and neighbors, I am pleased to announce that in acknowledging our city’s rich history, the city of Lemon Grove and the Lemon Grove Historical Society renamed “Civic Center Park” to “Treganza Park.” This name change honors the contributions of one of Lemon Grove’s founding families and the creator of the “BIG LEMON,” our city’s iconic landmark.

The city's electronic newsletter, "THE ZEST," has been revived this year to share our city's news better. And we have increased our social media presence to keep our residents informed about our services, programs, and community events. In the coming year, we will improve the city website. So, if you want to stay up to date on city news, subscribe to receive the Zest Newsletter and like, follow and add our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube channels.

We have made permanent what began as a pilot program, the increased traffic enforcement in our neighborhoods. My Council colleagues and I have added a motorcycle deputy to the Sheriff's contract to continue this neighborhood traffic safety program.

I am proud to remind you that, in 2021, Lemon Grove officially became a "Tree City," and we held our first Arbor Day event at Promenade Park. We aim to continue adding more trees to our cityscape to provide our children with a greener future and beautify Lemon Grove.

In past State of the City Addresses, I would share the workload statistics from the previous year.

<GRAPHIC WILL BE OVERHEAD WITH ALL THE STATS>

This year, we are showing the workload statistics on the screen to illustrate how much was accomplished in one year. A year where we were learning to live with a persistent pandemic and dealing with staff shortages in every operating department. We have a strong, resilient, and caring team that serves all the residents of Lemon Grove, and I like to say, "the city is in the business of taking care of the people's business!" And nothing can be accomplished without the dedicated work of our public employees. So, please join me in recognizing their accomplishments and all the meaningful work these statistics represent.

None of this work can be accomplished without stable and predictable revenue sources. Over the past few years, the City Council has authorized, and voters approved a cannabis tax. We have also entered into a long-term lease with Outfront Media for the county's first digital billboard to diversify our general revenue stream and expand city services provided to residents.

I am proud to announce that our budget is balanced and that we produced our first Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The financials for the city are stable

and risk-free and our credit score was upgraded in March of 2022 to an A-minus by Standard and Poor's. Although our budget is stable, we are still cautious about spending beyond our means. Consider this: Lemon Grove delivers its municipal services at a lower per-capita cost than any other city in the County of San Diego.

We still need to work to improve our financial independence with a locally generated sales tax. This additional revenue will permit us to support existing services and expand critical programs in ways we are currently unable to do. A local sales tax will help us realize the community's "Wish List" and continue to fund the services we already committed to. Although the timing may not feel right for the discussion of a new tax measure, this option should continue to be part of our public conversations. And if we do this, we can work together to create the kind of city we all can proudly call home.

As we look to next year, I assure you, our strategic priorities are ordered to be Achievable, Impactful and Sensitive to staff resources. Our goals focus on street repair, sidewalk expansion and traffic safety. Strategic efforts will enhance solutions for homelessness and improve neighborhood livability. Economic development and prosperity will prevail locally and regionally.

Our resilience abounds!

Our resilience comes from our residents!

OUR RESILIENCE IS WHAT MAKES LEMON GROVE STRONG!

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